

Geometric Abstraction and Kinetic Art in Latin America

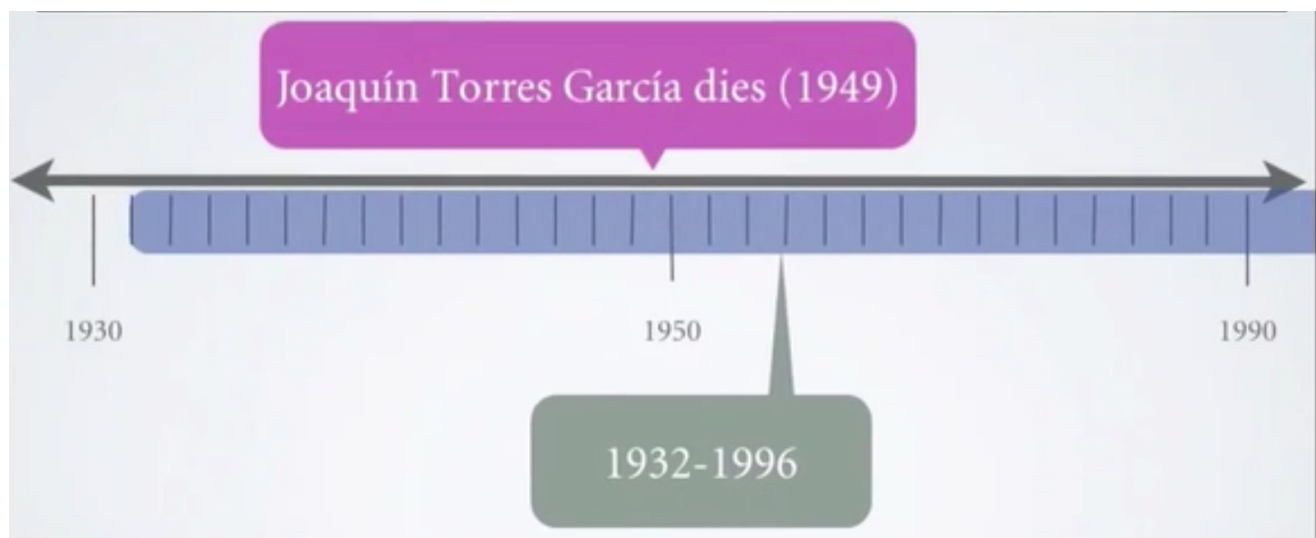
by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson is about geometric abstraction and kinetic art in Latin America. By the end of the lesson today, you'll be able to identify and define today's key terms, discuss the development of geometric abstractionism and kinetic art in Latin America, and identify examples of geometric abstractionist artwork and kinetic art. Geometric abstractionism in Latin America can trace its roots to Neoplasticism, or de Stijl, in the Netherlands while kinetic art in Latin America was developed by two Venezuelan artists. This lesson covers:

You'll be looking at art from between 1932 and 1996.



1. “Construction with Bell Tower”

Joaquín Torres García led a very interesting and full life, particularly academically, much too full to really do any justice to in this short tutorial. He was born in Montevideo in 1874 and left with this family in 1891 to live and study in Barcelona, Spain.

Torres García was arguably one of the most connected artists of the time, having worked with such artists as Antoni Gaudí, Joan Miro, Theo van Doesburg, and Piet Mondrian. In the late 1920s, he lived in Paris and was inspired by the work of Mondrian and **Neoplasticism**.

Unlike Mondrian and Doesburg, he never really rejected nature. Instead, he made some changes to Neoplasticism and created his own style, called **Constructive Universalism**, which borrowed elements from a number of movements, blended them together, and created something entirely new. It seemed a fitting move, given the varied experiences, education, and encounters he made throughout his life.

A painting by Joaquín Torres García:



Construction with Bell Tower by Joaquín Torres García

1932

Oil on canvas

As you can see in this painting, the influence of Cubism and Neoplasticism is very apparent. This can be seen specifically with the emphasis on flatness and rectilinear lines and planes. Torres García makes an interesting departure, though, in his use of color. He's not limited to primary colors, like other de Stijl artists. He developed a grid-like pattern in which he inserted symbols; in this case, a clock, letters, a key, and various geometric forms.

In 1934, he returned to Montevideo and brought with him his collective knowledge of over 40 years. His ideas spread throughout Argentina, which developed a unique version of **geometric abstraction** based on Constructivism, breaking through and destroying the frame.



TERMS TO KNOW

Neoplasticism

Also called “the style”—or de Stijl—characterized by qualities of planes, primary colors, and vertical and horizontal lines.

Constructive Universalism

A term attributed to the artwork of its originator, Joaquín Torres García (1874-1949), characterized by the artist’s combinations of different styles, movements and materials.

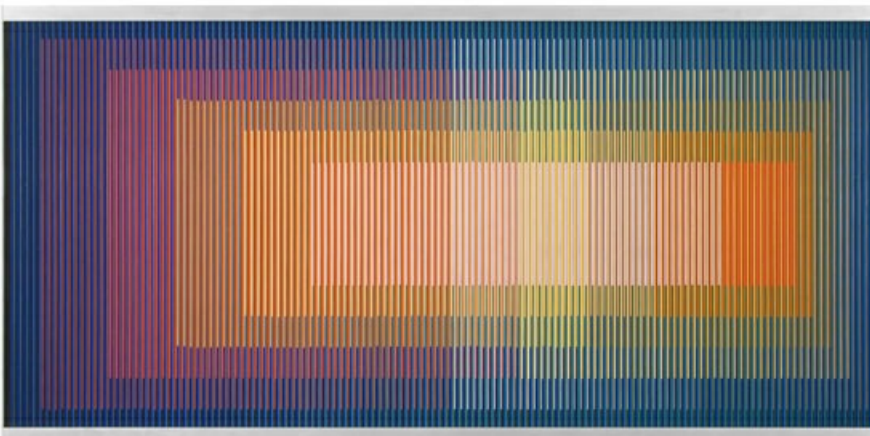
Geometric Abstraction

An art style or technique that is most often characterized by the use of non-representational geometric and spatial compositions.

2. “Physichromie 625”

During the mid-20th century, artists in Brazil developed a version of geometric abstraction that was based on depicting the illusion of movement. This idea of viewer participation was also important in the work of Venezuelan artists Carlos Cruz-Diez and Jesús Rafael Soto.

Carlos Cruz-Diez, who’s still alive, was also influenced by the color theorists and artists Josef Albers and Georges Seurat. He incorporated these ideas into his work, including his series of **Physichromie** paintings, one of which we see here:



Physichromie 625 by Carlos Cruz-Diez

1973

This was a series that began in 1959 and was created to explore the changes of color, dependent upon factors such as the amount of light or the position of the viewer. The tightly grouped parallel lines of varying colors create an interesting effect known as the More effect, which is a wavy illusion. It’s a form of **kinetic art**, which relies on optical illusions that make objects in the artwork appear to move, vibrate, and change color.



TERMS TO KNOW

Physichromie

An art style or technique that is characterized by its use of colored screens, movement of the viewer, or light to create a wide range of tonal qualities.

Kinetic Art

3. “Soto Sphere”

Jesús Rafael Soto was another kinetic artist that was born mere months apart from his fellow Venezuelan, Carlos Cruz-Diez. The example we see here is a form of art that also saw growth in Brazil in the 1960s and 1970s called **Penetrables**:



Soto Sphere by Jesús Rafael Soto

1996

Colored plastic tubes

As part of Soto’s experimentation with movement, the work of art appears to be a semi-solid sphere from a distance. This is merely an optical illusion formed by the careful arrangement of colored plastic strips. In fact, the viewer can and is encouraged to walk through the work of art. The important role of the viewer’s participation is fundamental to another genre of art we’ll talk about in another lesson, called Conceptualism.



BIG IDEA

Geometric abstractionism in Latin America can trace its roots to Neoplasticism, or de Stijl, in France, while kinetic art in Latin America was developed by two Venezuelan artists.



TERM TO KNOW

Penetrable

The characteristic of being able to be pierced or entered.



SUMMARY

Now that you've reached the end of the lesson, are you able to identify and define today's key terms? Can you discuss the development of geometric abstractionism and kinetic art in Latin America? Can you identify examples of geometric abstractionist artwork and kinetic art? You saw how geometric abstractionism in Latin America can trace its roots to Neoplasticism, or de Stijl, in France. You saw an example of this in "**Construction with Bell Tower**". Kinetic art in Latin America was developed by two Venezuelan artists. You saw two examples of their work: "**Physichromie 625**" and "**Soto Sphere**".

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Ian McConnell



TERMS TO KNOW

Constructive Universalism

A term attributed to the artwork of its originator Joaquin Torres Garcia (1874-1949) characterized by the artist's combinations of different styles, movements and materials.

Geometric Abstraction

An art style or technique that is most often characterized by the use of non-representational geometric and spatial compositions.

Kinetic Art

A style of art that has moving parts.

Neoplasticism

Also called 'the style' - or De Stijl - characterized by qualities of planes, primary colors, and vertical and horizontal lines.

Penetrable

The characteristic of being able to be pierced or entered.

Physichromie

An art style or technique that is characterized by its use of colored screens, movement of the viewer, or light to create a wide range of tonal qualities.